CYBERTHON
A 24-Hour Adventure In Virtual Reality

What Is Cyberthon?

Cyberthon is the name of an event the Whole Earth Institute is hosting for 24 hours from noon on October 6th to noon on October 7th, 1990 at Colossal Pictures in San Francisco. This event will focus on the cultural and social impact of Virtual Reality.

What is Virtual Reality?

According to Howard Rheingold, author of Tools for Thought, "Virtual Reality is the name for a new science and technology that is emerging worldwide. Head-mounted visual displays create the illusion of immersion in a computer simulated world, and special sensor-equipped gloves makes it possible to manipulate simulated objects by direct contact. Head-tracking devices enable the computer to update the world model, thus making it possible to navigate and explore the three-dimensional models known as virtual worlds. The technology already is used for scientific visualization, architectural design, and medical imaging. Future uses include advanced computer interfaces and communication technologies. Research is actively moving forward at NASA, the University of North Carolina, MIT and MIT Media Lab, and scores of other sites in the U.S., Japan and Europe."

How will Cyberthon be different from other Virtual Reality Conferences?

As stated above, Cyberthon will focus not on the technological advances in this field, but on the cultural and social impact of Virtual Reality. People from diverse backgrounds will get some hands-on experience with various forms of Virtual Reality and then be given the opportunity to think of how this innovative technology may impact their lives and culture in the foreseeable future.

Is this going to be a 24-hour conference?

This conference will run for 24 hours from Saturday October 6th to Sunday October 7th at the Colossal Pictures studios in San Francisco. Adding to the general ambience of virtual reality, the conference will follow a "Club Med" format -- e.g. once a visitor has paid his/her admission price no other exchange of money will occur.

To effectively, and magically, combine hands-on-demonstrations of Virtual Reality as it exists now with discussions on what turns it might take, activity will take place in two distinct areas throughout the 24 hour period. One of these areas will be a maze where real and virtual worlds are intertwined and the other space where speeches, group discussions and activities will be scheduled throughout.

What kind of things are going to happen in the maze?

A partial list of the activities the visitor will encounter, and can partake in or just watch, throughout the maze includes the following:

- hands-on experience with VPL, Autodesk and/or Sense8 equipment
- demonstrations of other novel V.R.-related technology such as those created by Michael Naimark and Chris Hardman
- entertainment by magicians, storytellers and other live performers
- films and videos about, and using, V.R.
- an opportunity to actually "build" a world (and maybe win a contest)
- innovative V.R. games which can be played to your heart's content

What kind of things are going to happen in the other area?

In the smaller area key speakers will talk about different aspects and applications of V.R., there will be group discussions and also group activities. A preliminary schedule for this area, which will change as our participant list grows. is as follows:

1:30 p.m.	Keynote Address (possibly by Dr. Marvin Minsky)
3:30 p.m.	The Human Interface - by Wendy Kellogg
5:30 p.m.	Industrial applications of V.R.
7:30 p.m.	Tactile Feedback Forum
9:00 p.m.	Discussion on the Social & Cultural Implications of V.R. (moderated by Howard Rheingold)
10:30 p.m.	Discussion on the Social & Cultural Implications of V.R. - Part 2
midnight	Jaron Lanier meets the Critics
2:00 a.m.	Live Performance (perhaps Penn & Teller)
4:00 a.m.	Live Group Experience (possibly an Antenna Theater audio tour)
6:00 a.m.	Live Group Experience - part 2
8:00 a.m.	Observations from V.R. Drama Experiment by Brenda Laurel
11:00 a.m.	Closing Address and presentation of the "Build Your Own World" contest awards

Who is going to participate in this event?

As of now Jaron Lanier, Eric Gullichsen, Chris Hardman, Michael Naimark, Wendy Kellogg, VPL Research, Autodesk, Sense8, Broderbund, and Antenna Theater have already committed to participating in the event. Steve Arnold, Margaret Minsky, Lucas Films, Brenda Laurel and Kathelin Hoffman have all expressed a strong interest in doing likewise.

The Cyberthon Steering Committee has compiled a comprehensive list of people and companies who are going to be invited to participate (see attached list). While some of these are indeed involved with Virtual Reality -- like Dr. Marvin MInsky of the Media Lab, Nat Durlach of MIT, Warren Robinett of UNC and Tom Furness of the University of Washington -- others are being asked because they are involved with creating alternative realities -- like story tellers, magicians and actors -- or because of their interest in V R and how it can affect their future.

Who are you inviting as guests?

As stated above, Cyberthon will focus on the cultural and social impact of Virtual Reality. Much like computers, this technology promises to affect the lives and work of many of us in the future, and for this reason we are inviting many non-technical individuals to attend.

Various areas of interest and endeavor we would like to see represented are: anthropologists, artists, biologists, educators, environmentalists, musicians, politicians, philosophers, photographers, poets, psychologists, social critics, and writers.

To get a well-rounded audience for discussions, it is important to make sure the attendees are diversified in interest and occupations, not just an event for the affluent, middle aged hacker.

How many people are you inviting?

To give everyone a chance to get as much hands-on experience with the technology, and to ensure that we have a mixture of different types of people, we are limiting the number of guests. Originally the number of guests had been limited to two hundred, but because of the large size of the studios donated to us by Colossal Pictures for this event and because of financial needs, this number is being reanalyzed.

How much will Cyberthon cost?

Although Colossal Pictures is generously donating the space, props, sets and some valuable management time, an initial estimate of the cost of putting on Cyberthon was made at $100,000.00. This figure incorporates pre-event office costs as well as those related to both Cyberthon and its participants.

In addition to these costs, we would like to be able to extend some free, or discounted, tickets to people who can't afford the ticket but would add to the diversity of the attendees. For example, educators, clergy and anthropologists might choose not to attend this event because of the price but their presence could add a great deal.

If only 200 paying guests were allowed in, at $250.00 each, Whole Earth Institute would have to come up with an additional $50,000 + to cover its costs. As a non-profit organization with limited funds, WEI knows it has to look for other ways to raise the additional money.

How will Whole Earth Institute raise additional funds?

The Steering Committee is analyzing the financial dilemma and will embark on two-fold line of action. First, as mentioned above, the actual number of paying guests could be increased. Doubling the number of paying guests to 400, for example, would help meet a large part of the cost. Also this increase, in the large space, could actually enhance the total experience.

At the same time members of the Steering Committee will be appealing to corporations for donations. These donations will help Whole Earth Institute meet its expenses and, hopefully, allow us to grant a limited number of scholarships to people who can't afford the ticket price but would add to the event.

What will Corporate Sponsors get for their donations?

Every Cyberthon Sponsor will be cited in all publicity surrounding the event, receive a set number of invitations to the Friday night Preview Party and be entitled to send a set number of people to Cyberthon itself.

Where will the proceeds of Cyberthon go?

Should there be any money left over after all expenses, these will go back to the host organization, Whole Earth Institute. The Institute is the Research & Development arm of POINT Foundation, a 501 c 3 non-profit organization which has brought you the *Whole Earth Catalogs* for the past twenty plus years.

Whole Earth Institute is constantly investigating innovative ways to give people access to tools, ideas and communities. Cyberthon is certainly an event which does this, and hopefully there will be some profit from it which can be used to seed other projects.

Are there other, non-financial, donations which could help cut costs?

Certainly our costs will be cut if we receive some things as donations or loans instead of having to buy or rent them. Among the items we can use are:

MAC IIs -- to be used in the "Build Your Own World" contest
Contest prizes
Video Monitors
Video equipment and tape
Camera equipment and film
Tape recorders
Walkie Talkies
MACs for general event coordination
Cots -- for the nap room
Lodging for participants
Cyberthon T-Shirts / Sweatshirts / Pens...

Where can I get more information on Cyberthon?

If you have questions about Cyberthon, or want an update on Participants, you can call the Whole Earth Institute office at (415) 332-1716 Monday through Friday or email "tiffy" or "cnash" on the WELL.